Alldredge - Int. 5070

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3/2/44

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release

Because the number of shad fishermen in the Chesapeake Bay has been sharply reduced by war conditions, about twice as many shad are now escaping the fishermen's nets to spawn in the rivers and upper sections of the Bay as in pre-war years, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

The larger number of spawners is expected to bring about a considerable increase in the abundance of shad, one of the Atlantic coast's choicest food fishes, but this increase will be only temporary if fishing for shad returns to its former intensity after the war, Charles E. Jackson, Acting Director of the Service, warned.

Service biologist recently have found that the Chesapeake's shad fisheries were so intensive that they caught 92 percent of all the shad that entered the Bay as recently as 1939. With many shad fishermen in service or engaged in other occupations, considerably fewer nets are now being fished and about 77 percent of the runs were caught in 1943. This 15 percent reduction in the intensity of the fishery was sufficient to double the number of spawners.

The severe decline in the shad catch in the Chesapeake - from 17,000,000 pounds about the year 1900 to some 3,000,000 pounds - has been receiving the joint attention of the State and Federal Governments for several years in an effort to work out a program of restoration.

Chief cause of the decline is considered to be overly intensive fishing which left too few shad to spawn and prevented recovery of the stock to a level at which larger catches could safely be made.

In 1941 Maryland adopted a law designed to exercise control over the intensity of the fishery through a licensing system. Virginia has no means of controlling the number of nets fished.

The present upward trend in the number of spawning shad may indicate that the fishing intensity has now been reduced enough to permit restoration of the runs to a desirable level of abundance, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists believe. They point out, however, that efforts should be made to prevent any increase in the present rate of fishing until it can be learned how large a stock can be built up under these conditions.

P. N. 36564